



HERD HEALTH MANAGEMENT AND DISEASE CONTROL PROGRAMMES FOR NEW ZEALAND DAIRY FARMS

Purpose of this document

Herd health management and disease control programmes are one of the ways that veterinarians can issue a veterinary authorisation to purchase and hold specific restricted veterinary medicines (RVMs) in anticipation of future use for dairy cattle. Veterinarians must also follow relevant standards issued by Vet Council under the Veterinarians Act 2005 that govern acceptable behaviour of veterinarians in relation to issuing veterinary authorisations.

The Dairy Cattle Code of Welfare requires dairy cattle owners to have a working relationship with a veterinarian. An annual [Animal Health and Wellbeing Plan](#) is a recommended best practice in this code.

This document sets out what Vet Council expects of veterinarians, when issuing a veterinary authorisation to purchase and hold RVMs in anticipation of use.

Veterinarians play a central role in preventing disease and maintaining the health and welfare of farm animals within the constraints of economic and environmentally sustainable farming.

Increasing concern about over-reliance on antibiotics (resulting in antimicrobial resistance), as well as broader concerns about animal welfare, have put greater emphasis on preventative measures in maintaining the health of farm animals. Herd health management (HHM) programmes take a population approach based on quantitative epidemiology which makes it possible to assess disease risk and, as a result, prevent and manage diseases more effectively.¹

Status of this document

This document sets expectations for veterinarians practising in New Zealand. Initially these are voluntary standards. They describe what veterinarians *should* do. We anticipate that, after two years, they will become required standards, setting out what veterinarians *must* do. This allows time for the profession to adapt.

¹ Improving Dairy Herd Health - Émile Bouchard



Proposal to make changes to the explanatory notes in the Veterinary Services and Client Relationships parts

We propose making minor changes to the explanatory notes in the Veterinary Services and Client Relationships parts of the Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinarians, to reference this new guidance.

Background

[Herd Health Management](#) (HHM) and [Disease Control Programmes](#)² (DCP), including disease surveillance, aim to optimise the health, welfare and production of production animals. This is achieved through a combination of frequent in-person clinical assessments, the collection and recording of sufficient herd information relevant for the individual farm, and the development of appropriate management strategies by the [General Veterinary Practitioner or Practice \(GVP\)](#) responsible for that farm.

Herd Health Management (HHM)

Principle [New]: Herd Health Management is an integral part of Production Animal Medicine and should be common practice where animals are under the care of a veterinarian.

HHM is a continuous process requiring regular veterinary reassessment to ensure the veterinarian has enough current knowledge of the health status of the animal(s). This will establish that, in their judgement, the choice of authorised RVMs and any agreed course of action is (still) appropriate and necessary, and that optimal animal welfare is achieved. Where necessary, timely and informed decisions must be made by the veterinarian to adjust and improve herd management and performance.

Ideally the HHM process should include the whole farm team being those that are involved in the daily delivery of animal health management decisions as well as those that have relevant financial authority. Regular contact with the farm team facilitates the development of a close working relationship and allows for the constant monitoring and re-evaluation of the farm's performance by the team which is particularly important when judging the success or failures of animal management decisions.

These processes encompass the application of a holistic perspective to the effective monitoring and diagnosis of infectious and non-infectious diseases, as well as disease prevention, surveillance, and biosecurity programmes. These processes are active across the animals' life cycle, from reproduction and neonate health to the transition stage and replacement of stock.

² ACVM Notice: requirements for Authorising Veterinarians 1.5(1) Issuing a veterinary authorisation to purchase and hold RVMs



This document should be read in conjunction with the [“Under the Care of a veterinarian”](#) and the [ACVM Notice: Requirements for Authorising Veterinarians](#) documents.

Disease Control Programmes

Principle [New]: Veterinarians play an important role in herd health management and disease control. This includes the continuity of care provided by comprehensive multi-seasonal and sequential year management of the common Disease Control Programmes for the animals under the care of a veterinarian.

Disease Control Programmes (DCPs) are a targeted and active management programme that addresses prevention, detection and management procedures for a specific diseases or animal health conditions (refer to [here](#) for further information).

The Key Disease Control Programmes that must be included in HHM for dairy cattle include the following animal health conditions:

1. udder health and milk quality management programme
2. mobility and lameness management programme
3. fertility and reproduction management programme
4. parasite management programme
5. infectious disease (including zoonotic) prevention and management programme
6. an adult cattle nutrition and transition management programme
7. calf health and nutrition management programme

They may also include:

- Herd improvement plans including breeding selection decision making;
- Environmental plans including adverse weather events and heat mitigation plans

A GVP may be responsible for one or more of the disease control programmes on a farm.

HHM will include standards of care customised for each farm that address:

- the herd's health and animal welfare
- production efficiency
- minimisation of morbidity and mortality
- minimisation of the risks of antimicrobial and parasite resistance



- minimisation of the risks of RVM residues in food products
- sustainable infectious and non-infectious disease treatment, prevention and management systems.

Veterinarians should also remain aware of the spectrum of care and work with farmers to provide care appropriate to the economic position of the farm in order for it to meet its financial objectives while balancing this with the needs and best interests of the animal(s) under their care.

The HHM process will consider impacts such as farm systems management, environmental factors such as climate and weather (as they relate to animal welfare and productivity), the farm's facilities, animal nutrition and health status, breed variations, resource availability, competence of the farm team, biosecurity, disease prevention and mitigation, and the minimum standards of welfare.

The HHM and key DCPs for the animals under the veterinarian's care should include, where appropriate:

- the names and specific roles of all personnel involved with the treatment and care of livestock on the farm and a record of their training. If there are personnel changes in these critical roles on farm they must promptly notify the veterinary business. The current contact details for the critical roles will be checked and known by the veterinary business.
- training of the critical staff on farm who have direct responsibility for the treatment and care of the animals should take place regularly and at least once annually to ensure that there is good veterinary medicines stewardship and that they are used appropriately.
- appropriate RVM authorisation, use and management including training on how to manage the risk of developing antimicrobial resistance (e.g. Appropriate infection prevention and control systems), correct use, storage, and disposal of RVMs.
- a documented discussion with the Client to ensure animal welfare obligations are recognised and met and that there are strategies to optimise the mental state and welfare of the animals. These strategies must include the appropriate administration of pain relief and responses to persistent/chronic pain.
- the key disease control programmes that detail treatment, prevention and management strategies.
- An arrangement for emergency care, taking into consideration the circumstances and the potential for adverse effects from, or failure of, the treatment or agreed course of action
- a biosecurity and infectious disease surveillance policy to minimise the spread of infectious disease between stock, which may include disease investigation and surveillance, the introduction of incoming stock and the isolation of stock with infectious disease.



- a record of the morbidity and mortality of animals to help identify short and longer term areas for the farm to work on
- a livestock management plan;
- steps to ensure food safety requirements that must meet the required residue management standards as outlined in NZCP1 and the [National Chemical Residues Programme](#);
- procedures for the management of acutely sick animals and adverse events;
- environmental plans including adverse weather events and heat and cold mitigation plans.
- herd improvement and animal breeding objectives.
- advice about zoonotic disease control and operator safety when handling RVMs.

Additionally, dairy herd health programmes may also be implemented as part of a milk processors “Terms of Supply”. In addition to the programmes above these programmes may include consideration of aspects of animal welfare, animal efficiency, and longevity factors, and other topics such as on-farm emissions and antimicrobial use.

The use of Restricted Veterinary Medicines (RVMs) in disease control programmes

Principle [New]: To ensure Continuity of Care for the animals under the care of a veterinarian, each DCP should be overseen by a single veterinarian or veterinary practice. i.e. appropriate case management cannot occur if the care is fragmented by veterinarians from multiple veterinary practices authorising RVMs to the animals for the same DCP.

In the implementation of DCPs, GVPs may [authorise RVMs](#) for the treatment and prevention of diseases and conditions in animals under their care.

Authorisation for future supply

Veterinarians may authorise an RVM for a specific animal or for a specific group of animals at the time of the consultation or as part of a wider DCP where the RVM may [be held by a specified person in anticipation of future use](#)³.

When veterinarians produce an [authorisation for future supply](#) (i.e. in anticipation of future use) in production animals, veterinarians must have enough current knowledge of the health status of the animal(s) to ensure that the ongoing use and choice of RVMs remains appropriate and necessary.

³ ACVM Notice: Requirements for Authorising Veterinarians



Maximum Period of Review

The veterinarian must obtain enough information throughout the period of supply of the authorisation to ensure that the circumstances have not changed and adjust the authorisation if required.

No matter the *period of supply* chosen the **maximum period of review** of the use of RVMs when authorised for a specified person to hold specific RVMs in anticipation of use is **six months**. This means a veterinarian must review the circumstances, choice of RVM, and treatment regime at least once every six months. This review will usually involve the veterinarian performing an in-person clinical assessment.

NB. Authorisations for future use must be reviewed at least six monthly.

Under the Care of two or more GVPs

If the animal/s are Under the Care of two or more GVPs, each GVP must take full responsibility for the key animal health condition or DCP that they have consulted on.

Each DCP can be overseen by only one veterinarian/veterinary business. A veterinarian/veterinary business can oversee more than one (or all) DCP.

Each GVP must only authorise RVMs relating to the programmes under their care.

Each GVP must provide a comprehensive emergency and afterhours service. For clarity this means that each GVP will themselves, or by arrangement with another veterinary service, provide emergency services for all of the key disease control programmes listed. They cannot opt out of this requirement, and is not acceptable to redirect emergency care after hours calls to other veterinarians without prior agreement.

Authorisation of RVMs by non-GVPs

In limited situations veterinarians other than the GVP may provide RVMs to farmers. These include:

1) Emergency situations

The GVP is not available at the time the RVMs are needed (for example due to an emergency or natural disaster).

2) Veterinary consultants.

A veterinarian offering veterinary consultancy services is expected to have a level of expertise that is significantly higher than could reasonably be expected for most dairy veterinarians and may include registered veterinary specialists. Consultants must comply with the requirements for offering a specific and limited range of veterinary services [add link to new Specific and



limited range of veterinary services]. Examples include consultancy for specific key animal health conditions or disease control programmes as listed above.

3) Veterinarians providing a specific and limited range services

A veterinarian providing a specific and limited range of veterinary service to the farmer's animals is not the GVP for a farm and offers **no more than one service** to the GVP's clients. The veterinarian must comply with the requirements for offering a specific and limited range of veterinary services (add link to new Specific and limited range of veterinary services).

Sharing of relevant information (outside of your business):

Principle: All veterinarians must share relevant information with those who need to know. Client consent is required unless it is an emergency or there are valid grounds for disclosure⁴.

All veterinarians must provide information to their clients about the products they authorise, and consider what products are already on the farm, including those RVMs authorised and provided by another veterinarian, before authorising more.

Before authorising RVMs for future supply⁵, a treating veterinarian should request and review information from the farmer about what authorisations and stocks of products are already on farm, and the expiry dates of that stock [Update Code].

The treating veterinarian must, with the client's consent, seek relevant information from the other veterinarians involved [add link to 'Under the Care of a veterinarian' – registered client definition].

This ensures that:

1. all relevant clinical information can be taken into account when making treatment or management decisions.
2. all veterinarians involved with the current care of the animal(s) know which other veterinarians are involved.

Prohibition on authorising RVMs without communicating with the GVP

When clients don't consent to the second veterinarian communicating with or obtaining clinical records from the GVP, the second veterinarian must consider whether they are able to provide veterinary services. The previous clinical records may contain important clinical information. Without this, outcomes and patient safety could be compromised.

Veterinarians **must not authorise RVMs** without first having communicated with any other GVP.

⁴ Code of Professional Conduct Professional Relationships [Section 1](#)

⁵ Code of Professional Conduct Veterinary Medicines: [Section 3 Authorisation](#) – Authorisation for future supply



[Note: Where a veterinarian or veterinary business is not providing the usual services or RVMs for a particular DCP, they should assume that there is another veterinarian providing them].

Alternatives for farmers wanting to purchase RVMs

Farmers, when wanting to purchase RVMs for animal health conditions or DCPs, other than from the authorising veterinarian, may:

- engage another veterinarian to become their GVP for that particular, or all of, their animal health conditions and DCPs.
- engage a veterinarian to provide a [specific and limited range of veterinary services](#).
- request a written authorisation from their GVP to enable them to purchase the RVMs from an [Approved RVM Seller](#).

Summary

Vet Council sees that the veterinarian's role when authorising RVMs for immediate use or in anticipation of future use as addressing various DCPs and to manage the risks on an ongoing basis. They can do this by ensuring that:

- their involvement addresses an individual animal's health event or a disease control programme
- the specified person on the authorisation is capable of making a diagnosis, selecting the correct product and administering it competently. This should include that they can monitor the animal's response including adverse events and get the appropriate assistance or take action where their health or welfare is compromised.
- RVM's (especially antimicrobials) are used responsibly and the quantity of RVM and duration of the period of supply of the RVM to be held on the farm is limited and appropriate, taking into consideration the potential for the circumstances to change.
- there is adequate advice and training provided in regard to the use, storage and withholding periods of RVMs authorised and dispensed.
- there are regular and appropriately frequent checks to confirm that the circumstances have not changed and the choice of RVM and treatment regime is still appropriate.
- they have appropriately frequent and real contact with the farm, farmer and the animals.

With this in mind Vet Council understands that it would be difficult for an individual veterinarian, not being the GVP and not having been involved in the development and implementation of the



herd health management or disease control programmes, to justify their involvement and meet the requirements of authorising RVMs in anticipation for future use.

A veterinarian finding themselves in this situation must meet all the requirements outlined in order to authorise RVMs in anticipation of future use. They also need to prevent fragmentation of the total veterinary input, and achieve the best possible veterinary care outcomes for the animal/s and the client.



Appendix

[Add real life examples of above]





Glossary

General Veterinary Practitioner: A General Veterinary Practitioner (GVP) is a veterinarian(s) or practice(s) that has the relationship agreement who can be considered to be the provider of the regular and general veterinary services for an animal or group of animals [add link to Under the Care document].

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Authorisation for future supply: Following a veterinary consultation, a veterinarian may authorise RVMs for future supply. This means the RVMs are authorised to be used in line with specific instructions on specified animals in specific situations beyond immediate use requirements. When authorising RVMs for future supply in production animals, veterinarians must have enough current knowledge of the health status of the animal(s) to ensure that the ongoing use and choice of RVMs remains appropriate and necessary. Veterinarians should obtain enough information through the period of supply of the authorisation to ensure that the circumstances have not changed.

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Issuing a veterinary authorisation to purchase and hold RVMs⁶: These are circumstances that involve on-farm herd health or reproduction or disease control programmes where a particular RVM must be administered as soon as specific signs are noticed, but the situation or circumstances justifying the use of that RVM could change over the short to medium term.

It is reasonable to authorise a person to hold specific RVMs to be used as instructed if there are regular and appropriately frequent checks by the authorising veterinarians to confirm that the circumstances have not changed and the choice of RVM and treatment regime is still appropriate.

The quantity of RVM's and duration the RVM's can be held must be limited and appropriate, taking into consideration the potential for the circumstances to change.

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Period of review: The interval between an initial authorisation and an in-person review of the circumstances, choice of RVM, and treatment regime.

Veterinarians must decide, when authorising RVMs, the most appropriate period of review for each product after considering the maximum period of review. The following maximum periods of review apply for authorisations:

- 6 months for Dairy cattle

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⁶ ACVM Notice: Requirements for Authorising Veterinarians



Specific and limited range of veterinary services: Refer to the Specific and Limited Range of Veterinary Services guidance.

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Veterinary consultancy services providers: Refer to the Specific and Limited Range of Veterinary Services guidance.

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Veterinary Medicines⁷: Important aspects to consider when authorising RVMs are:

Veterinarians must ensure they are satisfied that the choice and use of the product is justified and appropriate to achieve the intended effect and ensures the welfare of the animal.

When authorising the use of an RVM the veterinarian must have gathered sufficient information to support their decision.

The authorising veterinarian must be satisfied that the veterinary medicine will be administered safely and appropriately, and that it will only be used for the specific conditions authorised.

They must ensure use is justified, the RVM will be used appropriately and that all risks are managed.

Veterinarians are responsible for ensuring that people who administer veterinary medicines are competent to administer the treatments safely and as directed.

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Herd Health definitions

Annual Animal Health and Wellbeing Plans (AHWP): An AHWP is a documented outline of the farm's HHM process that is reviewed and published annually. It will outline the disease status of the farm identifying the key animal health and welfare challenges and areas of risk.

It will include a process for addressing the challenges and will include effective management programmes to minimise the incidence of relevant diseases including the common infectious and non-infectious diseases.

The AHWP will also incorporate the farmer's objectives and a means of measuring whether these farm specific targets are achieved or not by outlining how existing issues are to be tackled and measured and monitored in relation to animal health and productivity.

Synonym: Herd Health Plans, Animal Wellbeing Plans, and Animal Health Plans.

⁷ <https://hub.vetcouncil.org.nz/code-of-professional-conduct>



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Herd Health Management⁶ Programme: Herd Health Management is a continuous process and is sometimes called an animal health planning process.

'It is a method to optimise health, welfare and production in a population of dairy cows through the systematic analysis of relevant data and through regular objective observations of the cows and their environment, such that informed, timely decisions are made to adjust and improve herd management over time'⁸

Synonym: Animal Health Planning

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Animal Management Calendar: Is a management tool for farmers to help them in scheduling practices relating to the animals over a twelve-month period. The calendar addresses three categories:

- General Management Practices,
- Feeding Management, and
- Preventative Herd Health Care events.

Disease Control Program: A DCP is a targeted and active management programme addressing disease prevention, detection and management procedures for a specific disease or animal health conditions. It should be based on farm specific issues and at its most basic, it should ensure that illness, injury and mortality amongst farmed animals are well managed.

DCPs will often involve the authorisation of RVMs for treatment and prevention of the condition.

⁸ Dairy herd health. M Green et al